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## ***Frequently Asked Questions about Metal Detecting and Archeology***

### **Is metal detecting on archeological sites OK?**

Archeologists discourage metal detecting on archeological sites unless it is part of an archeological project. Uncontrolled and unreported excavation of archeological sites, whether by a metal detectorist or anyone, does result in significant diminishment of their research value. Metal detecting can be particularly destructive as it can result in the virtual extraction of all metal artifacts from valuable archeological sites, resulting in a very skewed remaining archeological record of the past human use of those places.

### **Under what circumstances would an archeologist think is it OK to metal detect?**

If the primary object of your metal detecting is recent coins and jewelry—the types of things commonly lost at places of public congregation (parks, beaches, etc.), then your activities will likely have little important impact on significant archeological resources. If, however, you seek historical objects left or discarded at places of past domestic, commercial, industrial, or military activity (for example old home sites, stores, ferry sites, mills, foundries, factories, encampments, forts, or battlefields), then you should work only with archeologists.

### **If I find something should I tell you about it?**

Should you discover, through your hobby, sites of potential historical importance (such as old home sites, stores, ferry sites, mills, foundries, factories, encampments, forts, or battlefields that are more than 50 years old), please report them to the Office of Archeology. A dot on a map with a verbal description of the site location, accompanied by a description of the find (photographs would be great), will allow us to add your site to the inventory of historic places we maintain. Please understand that our Office, through this inventory, exercises no control over the use of private property, nor do we have any claim to objects found on private property. The inventory is used primarily for research purposes, and secondarily by land use planners. This second use can provide a limited measure of protection for the site should government (Federal, State, or—in some cases—local) seek to impact it.

### **Who owns what I find?**

It is generally true that objects/artifacts embedded in or laying upon the ground belong to the owner of the land on which they are found, and only the landowner can give permission to keep material found on their property. Further, landowners can control access to their property through application of trespass law. For these reasons, and for common courtesy, you should always truthfully seek permission of landowners before you hunt their property, letting them know what you intend to do and why.

### **Can I metal detect on state lands?**


The only metal detecting allowed on State lands without a permit is a search for modern objects on all State-owned swimming beaches except at **Point Lookout** and **Calvert Cliffs**.

The Maryland Office of Archeology issues permits for investigations that may affect archeological resources located on State-owned lands ([State Finance and Procurement Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, §5A-342](#)). Anyone, including professional archeologists, seeking to excavate on State-owned lands for the purpose of locating and recovering historic artifacts must obtain a permit from our Office. This permit process is properly invoked by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources when individuals approach their land managers with requests to metal detect on DNR lands (see [Code of Maryland Regulations Title 08, Department of Natural Resources, Subtitle 07, Forests and Parks, Chapter 06, Use of State Parks](#) and scroll down to Paragraph 18, “Relics, Treasures, and Metal Detectors”). The regulations provide, however, that metal detectors may be used to search for modern objects on all State-owned swimming beaches excepting Point Lookout and Calvert Cliffs (because such searches are for modern objects, a permit from our office is not required). Should you wish to apply for a permit from our office, please contact the Office of Archeology. Please be aware, however, that the Office issues permits only to professional archeologists, or to those working with or under the direction of professional archeologists, and only for research or rescue purposes.

### **Does the Office of Archeology issue permits for metal detecting on non-State lands?**

The Office of Archeology is not involved with the issuing of permits for archeological or metal detecting activities on private, Federal, or municipal lands. However, such activity is generally prohibited by law. It is, for example, illegal to surface collect, metal detect, or dig on any federal lands without a federal permit. One good source of information regarding laws and regulations pertaining to metal detecting on these types of lands is found on the [Society for American Archaeology website](#). As with any hobby, it is important that metal detecting be conducted in a lawful, respectful, and courteous manner. For metal detectorists, there can be serious consequences for unlawful practice. If you are unsure how the law might pertain in any given instance, please feel free to contact our Office, and we will try to assist you.

### **Do archeologists and metal detectorists work together?**

Yes, they do. Archeologists and metal detectorists have a great deal in common in terms of their love and passion for history, and they have much to offer each other in terms of their unique skills and their different knowledge of history. Collaborations between archeologists and metal detectorists are increasingly common, and have resulted in some very significant research findings. An excellent local example of such a joint project occurred at the Monocacy National Battlefield Park near Frederick, Maryland and [www.heritage.umd.edu/CHRSWeb/NPS/Monocacy/NewPerspectives.pdf](http://www.heritage.umd.edu/CHRSWeb/NPS/Monocacy/NewPerspectives.pdf) . For information about other collaborations between archeologists and metal detectorists (including the Battle of Little Big Horn project), visit the [Society for American Archaeology website](#).

### **Does the Office of Archeology work with metal detectorists?**

Our Office has successfully worked with metal detectorists before. We are interested in engaging and educating metal detectorists in participating in archeological projects in a beneficial way. To learn more about opportunities to participate in archeological–metal detectorist collaborative work with this office or other archeological programs in Maryland, please contact:

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